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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: AMGT CASC KFLU PINR PREL AL
SUBJECT: H1N1 Update - Albania

Ref: Tirana 567

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE TREAT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On November 12 Albanian authorities reported a total of 57 verified cases of H1N1 in Albania, as well as an increase in the number of unspecified "respiratory illnesses" compared to this time last year. On November 10, the Albanian Public Health Institute announced that it has begun testing for the H1N1 virus in Tirana and at least two schools were reporting student absences possibly due to the H1N1 virus or seasonal flu. END SUMMARY.

H1N1 Cases on the Rise

¶2. (SBU) According to the Albanian Institute of Public Health (ISHP), in recent weeks there has been a surge in the number of H1N1 virus patients. Ten cases were reported this past week and nine cases the previous week. The Institute of Public Health confirmed that several schools in Tirana and one in northern Albania have confirmed cases of H1N1. Epidemiology specialists are working with the schools to monitor the situation. Consideration is being given to closing the affected schools. Nevertheless, Minister of Health Petrit Vasili publicly stated last week that the H1N1 situation in Albania is "stable and under control."

World Bank to Assist With Vaccine Purchase

¶3. (SBU) Health Minister Vasili said publicly last week that approximately 1.2 million doses of the H1N1 vaccine, an amount deemed sufficient by health authorities to cover Albania's immediate needs, will arrive in Albania by the end of November and a vaccination program will begin in December. Priority groups targeted for receiving the immunizations and a distribution plan have been developed, he said. However, other health professionals have told Post that they are unaware of concrete plans for acquiring the vaccine.

¶4. (SBU) The GOA still lacks the funds to purchase vaccines, but expects to receive assistance from the World Bank. Following a government request, the World Bank plans to directly support the MoH in purchasing H1N1 vaccines and related medical equipment.

¶5. (SBU) On November 10, Minister Vasili inaugurated Albania's new laboratory at the ISHP that will conduct tests on the H1N1 virus within 5 hours of the receipt of samples. Albania's tests were previously conducted at a lab in Bucharest.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: It appears that Minister Vasili's statements on the stability of the H1N1 situation in Albania do reflect the current situation. However, it is of concern that the GOA does not appear to have a specific plan for the actual purchase of vaccines and seems to be relying on broad statements and vague timelines. With the assistance of the World Bank, Albania should be able to obtain a number of H1N1 vaccines, but the actual amount may be below

what the MoH is hoping for. The opening of the ISHP laboratory should increase the GOA's ability to track the spread of H1N1 within Albania, although combatting that spread will be difficult until the vaccines arrive.

WITHERS